

## **BLENDING ICT INTO LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on language learning has been acknowledged globally to such an extent that blending of ICT in language learning has become inevitable in today's teaching learning process. This paper makes a study of the blended language learning and the role of ICT in language learning and teaching environment, advantages and challenges involved in the process with some suggestions.

**KEYWORDS:** English Language, Teaching and Learning Process, ICT, Technology, Blended Learning

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the last decade, changing conceptions of learning and rapid technological advances have been accompanied by changes in language teaching and learning. Language classrooms are increasingly turning into blended learning environments that focus on active learning. Blended language learning uses multiple teaching and guiding methods by combining face-to-face sessions with online activities and utilizing a mix of technology-based material. Randall admits that technology has become a major component; a must-have in many homes around the world, with its concomitant influence permeating all facets of human lives, including education.

### **Defining ICT**

ICT (information and communications technology - or technologies) is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning. ICTs are often spoken of in a particular context, such as ICTs in education, health care. In other words, ICT Stands for "Information and Communication Technologies." ICT refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. It is similar to Information Technology (IT), but focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums.

In the past few decades, information and communication technologies have provided society with a vast array of new communication capabilities. For example, people can communicate in real-time with others in different countries using technologies such as instant messaging, voice over IP (VoIP), and video-conferencing. Social networking websites like Face book allow users from all over the world to remain in contact and communicate on a regular basis.

Modern information and communication technologies have created a "global village," in which people can communicate with others across the world as if they were living next door. For this reason, ICT is often studied in the context of how modern communication technologies affect society.

### **ICT in Language Teaching and Learning**

Technology-enhanced language learning involves a blend of face-to-face teaching and other interactive

(and therefore frequently electronic) practice activity. ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has been used in almost all fields of life, including in education. The utilization of ICT in education has recently started to appeal the potential and significant progress in language learning. The computers play significant role in the learning process especially in learning language. As Hartoyo states, "a computer is a tool and medium that facilitates people in learning a language, although the effectiveness of learning depends totally on the users". The need of technological innovation has brought the communication revolution and rapid development of technological application in teaching and learning. The tradition of English teaching has been drastically changed with the remarkable entry of technology. Technology provides so many options as making teaching interesting and also making teaching more productive in terms of improvements. Technology is one of the most significant drivers of both social and linguistic change. As the number of English learners is increasing different teaching methods have been implemented to test the effectiveness of the teaching process.

### **Role of ICT in Language Teaching and Learning Process**

English language teaching has been shaped by the search for the 'one best method' of teaching the language. Regardless of whether the focus of instruction has been reading, the grammatical rules and vocabulary of the target language (e.g. Grammar Translation Method), speaking (how to communicate the target language such as Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, The Silent Way, Community Language, Communicative Approach), or other issues (e.g. The Total Physical Response Method), the attempts of the teaching profession have been shaped by a desire to find 'a' better way of teaching than the existing method. The latest method that is developing is Computer Assisted Language Teaching.

The impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on language learning has been acknowledged globally such that the integration of ICT in language learning has become indispensable in today's teaching-learning environment. The effective teaching and learning of English has gone beyond the stereotypical to regimented/tradition of mere classroom teaching because of the emergence of various gadgets in information and communication technology.

With the rapid development of science and technology, the emerging and developing of multimedia technology and its application to teaching, featuring audio, visual, animation effects comes into full play in English class teaching and sets a favorable platform for reform and exploration on English teaching model in the new era. It's proved that multimedia technology plays a positive role in promoting activities and initiatives of student and teaching effect in English class. Technological innovations have gone hand –in hand with the growth of English and are changing the way in which we communicate. Tutors may assume different roles and accomplish a variety of tasks in blended learning. The degree of involvement can have various possible arrangements in blended learning. Garret opines that "The integration of ICT in teaching and learning is not a method; rather it is a medium in which a variety of methods, approaches and pedagogical philosophies may be implemented." This statement shows that the effectiveness of ICT depends on how and why it is applied and integrated. According to Taylor (1980), ICT usage is classified to tutor, tool and tutee.

In a language classroom the computer may play the roles of

- **Teacher** – it teaches students new language
- **Tester** - it tests students on the already learned structures
- **Tool** – it assists students to do certain tasks
- **Data source** – it provides students with the information they need to solve

- Different tasks
- **Communication Facilitator** – it allows students to communicate with others.

## **ADVANTAGES OF ICT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Blended language learning has numerous advantages. Some of the advantages are discussed under the following heads:

### **Gives More Opportunity and Bridges the Gap**

In context of language learning, ICT has an important role as the “media” bridging and enabling the learning process, or direct communication between students and teacher although they are not present in the same room or place in certain time. The application of ICT gives more opportunities for communication between peer learners: they can exchange information in real time, they can participate in blog discussions, work in teams on different projects, exchange emails, search for information, etc. By using the authentic material provided by the Internet, we will have a better insight into the culture of the country and people whose language we study. Carmen et al., opines that integrating ICT tools in teaching can lead to increased students’ learning competencies and increased opportunities for communication.

### **Provides More Reference Material**

The Internet also offers a wide variety of reference materials like online dictionaries, e-encyclopaedias and search mechanisms very helpful for developing students’ individual work. They can find, alone, the missing information, the meaning of new words, synonyms, antonyms or can communicate with the rest of the group online, via e-mail or in any other ICT environment.

### **Hypermedia and its Benefits**

The methodology of language learning has developed a new way of using ICT in teaching, the Hypermedia. Hypermedia provides the language teacher and the language learner with multimedia resources, such as texts, graphics, sound, animation, video linked together. They have greater control over their learning because they can go at their own pace, they can do some activities on their own, can skip some parts of the text or revise the ones they find difficult. Another major advantage of hypermedia usage is that the learner can focus on the content and access different links with grammar explanations, exercises, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. above all, hypermedia brings variety to your class. Students get used to learning the foreign language in a new and pleasant way, not just by interacting with the teacher and reading from the book.

### **Helpful in Enhancing Motivation and Interaction**

The use of ICT tools in teaching and learning has positive effects on behavior, motivation, communication and process skills and that it enables pupils to learn more autonomously. Besides motivating pupils and raising self-esteem and confidence, ICT can enhance pupil interaction, verbalization and involvement in collaborative learning.

### **Keeping up-Dated with the World**

Innovations in teaching and learning are directly related to new ways and new tools that correspond to the life style of learners and to those things that attract and motivate them. Using ICT can facilitate keeping up with technical innovations and the changing learning environment.

### **Brings Variety**

The application of ICT has considerably enriched the variety of methods, resources and a range of activities for learning languages. The proportion of independent learning can be adjusted and brought into compliance with the teacher's actual time availability. Besides, ICT offers opportunities that cannot be developed within traditional learning: the increased amount of self-study adds to sustainability of learning skills, which is of primary importance in the rapidly changing world.

### **Effective**

On-line testing, computer based vocabulary or grammar exercises make the process of memorizing and routine checking up less boring and more effective. Another way of escaping the routine of language learning is a variety of language activities that can be performed only through the application of IT.

### **Getting New Experience**

Technology-assisted ways of learning languages offer new opportunities for professional development. Tutors have to keep up with the rapid development of high technologies and software to be able to select the most appropriate ones and advise their learners on the best ways to use them. Becoming engaged in blended learning means for the tutor a constant movement ahead; the process itself is a most powerful motivation mechanism, where all the agents depend on and enrich each other. Any language is a means of communication, it is a phenomenon of social life. Many on-line courses include communicative activities (discussion, correspondence, problem solving) that develop certain communication and socializing skills.)

### **Novelty and Creativity**

Another widely commented on advantage of being engaged in blended learning is an opportunity to create your own teaching materials. High technologies do not only provide a huge bank of on-line resources for language learning, they also offer "Do-It-Yourself" possibilities: a tutor can not only update or complete the existing ready-made courses, but he can tailor the course according to the specific needs of his learners. A teacher can use different materials for each lesson, not like in teaching with textbooks, where all classes presenting a certain topic are the same.

### **Capacity to Control Presentation**

This capacity marks the difference between computers and books. Books have a fixed presentation, unlike computers, which can combine visual with listening materials, text with graphics and pictures.

### **Feedback**

Computers provide a fast feedback to students' answers through error correction. It not only spots the mistake but also corrects it, sometimes even giving the appropriate advice.

### **Adaptability**

Computer programmes can be adapted by teachers to suit their students' needs and level of language knowledge. Unlike books, which are produced in a single uniform format and need to be taught irrespectively of students' problems, computer programmes are more learner- friendly.

### **Learner –Centered**

ICT blended teaching stresses the role of students, and enhances the importance of "interaction" between teachers

and students. A major feature of blended teaching is to train and improve students' ability to listen and speak, and to develop their communicative competence. During this process, the teacher's role as a facilitator is particularly prominent. Using multimedia in context creation creates a good platform for the exchange between teachers and students, while at the same time providing a language environment that improves on the traditional classroom teaching model. In this way, teachers in the classroom no longer blindly input information and force students to receive it in a passive way. learner autonomy is considerably increased in comparison with traditional foreign language teaching

According to Richards, "English Language Teaching (ELT) is an area that has changed over the years, moving from very teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered ones."

## **CHALLENGES/CONSTRAINTS INVOLVED**

The act of blending ICT into teaching and learning is a complex process and one that may encounter a number of difficulties. The learning process in **ICT** provides new perspectives, new challenges and issues to consider by teachers who are involved in this kind of education. Even the most experienced of teachers might hesitate when facing a task of supervising a technology enhanced course. Some of these issues are:

### **Discarding Junk and Selecting the Right Material**

The view that the internet and other forms of information and communication technology are of immense benefit to the education system is incontrovertible. The internet is repository of enormous content but it also contains an equal amount of junk and obscene sites which, if not regulated and censored before students are allowed to work on it, can lead to all forms of moral decadence, especially among teenagers and youths. The teachers are not totally immune from the obscene sites.

### **Poverty and Economic Mismanagement**

Poverty and perhaps economic mismanagement can be seen as great impediments to the viability and sustainability of the use of ICTs in English Language teaching and learning process.

### **Expensive and Unreliable Equipment**

Electricity, phone lines, internet facilities etc. are either unreliable or expensive.

### **Poor Maintenance of the Gadgets**

Poor maintenance of the existing ICT gadgets (where provided) is a debilitating factor against the use of ICT in language education.

### **Lack of Laboratory**

There are no language and computer laboratories. Lack of laboratory results in lack of practice and exposure which creates problem in the use of ICT in the class.

### **Large/Crowded Classrooms**

Large or overcrowded classes may interfere with the objectives of the use of ICTs. Managing the large class rooms is full of troubles which involve the problem of maintaining discipline, paying attention, clearing doubts and other such problems which make the use of ICT difficult.

**Lack of Confidence**

Lack of confidence is the major barrier faced by many teacher. Many teachers are afraid of entering into the class and face the students with the limited knowledge in the area of ICT.

**Lack of Teacher Competence**

Teachers competence in integrating ICT into pedagogical practice is another barrier which is directly related to teachers lack of confidence. The teachers who do not use computers in the class room claim that lack of skills are a constraining factor preventing teachers from using ICT for teaching.

**Resistance to Change and Negative Attitude**

Teachers attitude and inherent resistance to change is another challenge. Indifferent attitude and resistance to change concerning the use of new strategies in teaching is a major challenge that makes the teaching process difficult.

**Lack of Time**

Many teachers have competence and confidence, in spite of being capable of using the modern technology, they do not use it because of lack of time. Hence, time limitation and the difficulty in scheduling enough computer time for classes often prevents the teacher from adopting ICT in their teaching. The busy schedule, vast syllabus, preparation for class and non-academic work (administrative work like maintaining the records etc) leaves little room for using ICT.

**Lack of Training**

The main problem in implementing ICT in language classes is the lack of training. Insufficient amount of in-service training, particularly in the use of computers and other electronic and technical gadgets prevents the teacher from using them in the classroom. Not having a technological background also prevents them from using ICT in teaching.

**Lack of Technical Support**

Lack of proper technical support is another factor that prevents the use of ICT in teaching. The technical barriers include: waiting for the website to open, failure of internet connections, malfunctioning computers and printers, using old computers and printers, unattended software and hardware problems resulting in higher risk of technical breakdowns prevents the free-flow of the lesson, which also leads to wastage of time and losing interest in teaching and learning process.

**Lack of Qualified and Proficient Teachers**

Lack of proper qualified teachers is the major problem in the teaching profession. A teacher should be a continuous learner. But after attaining a certain degree, people generally stop learning further. In order to have a proper professional development, it is essential to have on- going research and keep up dated in the concerned field. In today's modern world it is essential to learn to work with the latest equipment. This also is a major impediment in the use of ICT in teaching language.

According to Morsel "The success or failure of a teaching – learning situation in language acquisition rests to a large extent on the teacher". However, it has been discovered that many teachers are yet to upgrade or familiarize themselves with ICT and its application in the classroom setting.

## SUGGESTIONS

To overcome these constraints and make the blend of ICT more rewarding it is essential to have the following:

- **In – Service Training**

In- service training at a regular basis and regular interval would be helpful in keeping up dated with the trends thereby making the teachers proficient enough to make their teaching process effective.

- **Professional Development for the Teachers**

Professional development is another aspect that would keep the teachers up graded. On going research work, publishing research articles, attending workshops, conferences, seminars and presenting papers in them would not only provide a very good opportunity for the professional development but also provide a very good platform and opportunity to interact and share with other teachers, this would enable them to learn and develop.

- **Courses/Exams for Teachers**

Some of the courses which help the English teachers in their professional development are:

TKT, CELTA, CELTYL, IELTS TRAIN THE TRAINER, TEFL, TESOL, DELTA, KET and PET. These are a few teacher training courses which would hone the teachers in their teaching skills and keep them up dated.

- **Regular Practice for Students**

Regular practice activities, tasks, exercises and worksheets will be helpful in developing the language skills (LSRW), accuracy in grammar, fluency and thereby make them proficient in English.

- **Courses/Exams for Students**

Some of the courses/exams which would be helpful in developing and testing the language proficiency in the students are:

IELTS, BEC, CAE, TOEFL, FCE etc.

## CONCLUSIONS

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) cannot be underestimated in language teaching and learning process because emerging technologies make it pertinent and practical to approach learning in ways that have been advocated by scientists, theorists and educational psychologists. The scope of tools technology offers for education – especially in the field of foreign language learning/teaching – is vast and ever-growing. Without a doubt, technology has revolutionized society in many places around the globe, including how language instruction is taught and delivered.

The growing use of ICT in blended language learning environments has changed the face of language learning and teaching in a beneficial way and will continue to do so in future with further technological developments. Therefore, if we try to blend technology in our teaching, our new, refocused approach to teaching will propel us a long way to making technology and the internet a more rewarding partner in the teaching and learning process. Harrell and Harris and Young and Lewis discovered that teacher candidates have generally positive response to blended learning in terms of overall satisfaction and enjoyment.

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